

# The Truth about Hollywood-Behind the Scenes

How the Film Studio City and Its People Closely Resemble  
Places of Equal Size and Folk Elsewhere—Lurid  
Reports of Drugs, Liquor and Wild Parties  
Traced to Their Source



These are the  
"Doors of Hope"—  
They are the doors  
all the girls who go to  
Hollywood hope to  
enter. The "stars"  
dressing rooms at one  
of the studios. On  
each door is a name,  
some name famous  
around the world—  
and to get her name  
on one of these doors  
many a girl has gone  
through tragedy.

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## CHAPTER II.

IT ought to be possible to write sanely about the morals of Hollywood. It will be well to keep in mind the purpose of the slightly bewildered but resolute statesman who said "I will go to the end of the road, let the chips fall where they may." Recollection of the well known limerick also may be useful:

"Said the Reverend Jabez McCotton,  
'The waltz of the Devil's begotten.'  
Said Jones to Miss Blye,  
'Don't you mind the old guy;  
To the pure almost everything's rotten.'"

I went to Hollywood to find out the truth, good and bad. I talked with actors, directors, producers, screen writers, extras, merchants, doctors, ministers, bankers, detectives, performers, extollers, denouncers, newspaper men and women, publicity men, housewives, onlookers, lenders, spenders and others of high and low degree and varying standards of veracity. I sat with the heads of official agencies investigating the Taylor murder, the traffic in narcotics and bootleggers. I watched movie people at their work and their frolics. I went without instructions except to get the facts and without other attitude except that of reporter.

In the minds of many persons who have read of the "Arbuckle party" in San Francisco and the Taylor murder in Los Angeles there has been created this picture:

Hollywood, the motion picture capital; a community of dissolute actors and actresses and others of the movie industry; the worst of them unspeakably vile, the best suspiciously; a colony of unregenerate and narcotic addicts; given to wild night parties commonly known as 'orgies'; heroes of the screen by day and vicious roysterers by night; a section of civilization gone rottenly to smash.

For comparison to the profligacy of Hollywood the critics go back to Tyre and Sidon and Rome; to Alexandria, Herculaneum and Pompeii; to the later Caesars, to Nero and Caligula; to the Herodian courts

of Judea; to Belshazzar and Alexander. The sorriest historical procession is conjured.

Hollywood, which had never thought of itself in quite that light, laughs merrily at first, as the accusation is echoed back from the East. Then, compelled to believe that a considerable part of the public is taking the indictment seriously, it soberly sets about preparing its defense.

What is the evidence as to "orgies," narcotics, alcohol, vice, extravagant living? I shall tell in sequence whatever I was able to find out. But just before the plunge the heartening fact comes to mind that a little while ago the residents of Beverly Hills assembled to discuss the laying out of a polo field. Beverly Hills is part of the "Hollywood district," an "exclusive" part, where Douglas Fairbanks and Mary-Pickford, Charles Ray, Will Rogers and many other stars live in sequestered comfort. When it was Rogers's turn to speak he said:

"Folks, I've sort o' been looking over this corner of the world, and it does look as if there are some mighty pretty places for a polo outfit. But I also noticed another thing, and that is there is no church in Beverly Hills. Now, it probably would do my kids and me a lot of good to dress up and get out and play polo, but I figure it would be just as well if we attended to this church business first. I move you, Mr. Chairman, that we go ahead and raise the money, but spend it on a church instead of a polo field. I can chip in \$500, if that's agreeable to you all." And those motion picture people gave a whoop at the brilliancy of Will Rogers's suggestion, and as soon as the architect gets his plans drawn that church will begin to materialize.

There is some truth in the stories of wild "parties" in and about Hollywood. Those who have attended them contend that they have been no worse than similar things indulged in by persons of the same moral stripe in other parts of the country, notably New York. But of such stupidly disgusting conduct I never have heard. These "parties" virtually ceased after the Arbuckle affair in San Francisco. Their

The home of "Doug and Mary" in the Beverly Hills district of Hollywood. At right is a never before published picture of Taylor, the murdered director, taken when he was leading man for Fanny Davenport, and known as "Cunningham Deane." At top is one of the causes of the great interest in Hollywood—the comedian Roscoe Arbuckle.

participants were a relatively small number of men and women, members of overlapping circles of movie parasites and occasionally a real star. The leading figure in several of them was a comedian, not now active, who mentally and morally never has risen above his low beginnings. His popularity with the public enabled him to earn a great deal of money. He spent it as such a man might be expected to spend it. He was generous and acquired a reputation in his set as a prince of hosts. A flock of flatterers gathered around to help him get rid of his salary. He gave party after party of the same general type, some of them reaching their climax in everybody getting drunk, some going indescribably further.

An investigator whose word I have no reason to doubt told me he had definite evidence of four of the more extreme parties. Three of them were staged in Los Angeles hotels, the fourth in a private residence in Hollywood. The first one brought together ten men and ten women. Some of them were drug addicts. Liquor was provided by the host for everybody, and morphine and cocaine, with hypodermic syringes, for those who craved them.

The second "party" of this type was held, the investigator told me, in the Hollywood home of an actor. It lacked one bad feature, but included all the others, and in addition some of the more intoxicated re-



velers disrobed as they danced. This was a large gathering—more than 100 persons. Nearly all were disreputable and so regarded by the others of the Hollywood community. The third and fourth entertainments were not essentially different from the others.

The same investigator told me there had been bathing parties on the beaches at which some of the "ladies and gentlemen" who had forgotten to bring their bathing suits were not prevented from going into the water comfortably. I have heard of a similar exhibition not twenty miles from New York.

Scandalous stories may be heard in Hollywood and Los Angeles by any one who cares to listen. On this trip it was my duty to listen, but I do not present on this page as a fact anything which is merely hearsay. One of the stories I had read pictured a handsome and popular film actor as puncturing himself in the stomach with a hypodermic needle at the peak of an exciting dinner attended by "stars," and crying "This is the life." Most of the persons I met had never heard of this incident, although some of them believed the actor in question was a morphine user.

The only person I found who professed

to know the truth of this tale was a newspaper man. He said he had attended the party and had seen the incident. But a veteran of Hollywood who has watched the stars blaze up and die down and has kept pretty close watch on them and their habits said to me: "I wish you'd tell me who this newspaper man is and I'll find him and tell him that he's not only a liar but a blank-blank one."

It may be mentioned here that I met in Hollywood several friends whom I had known for years. They are in the best position to know what is going on. They are the sort of men who, despite their connection with the picture industry—or art—might be expected to tell me confidentially whatever secrets of public interest they knew, just as I would tell them if they came to New York.

But the fact is that these learned and agreeable gossips did not believe one-thousandth part of the stories in circulation and were ready to fight at the drop of the bat to demonstrate the falsity of these tales. Their solicitude lest I should prove gullible was touching. And some of the dark mysteries of Hollywood that I had occasion to ask them about they had never heard of at all. They told me so, and I believe them.

Now as to drugs, are they in common use in Hollywood? No. I looked into this question with special care and learned:

The larger cities of California are cursed with an extraordinary number of peddlers of opium, heroin, morphine and cocaine. The Chinese brought the first opium to the West coast, and many Californians acquired the habit from them before the East heard of it and before alkaloids were used at all. Drugs are smuggled into San Pedro, the port of Los Angeles, by Japanese, Chinese, British and other vessels. They also come over the border from Mexico and down from British Columbia and the northwestern ports of the United States. Much of it also is manufactured in Philadelphia and St. Louis, exported to Mexico in ostensibly legitimate traffic and smuggled back to the United States.

The Government and State anti-narcotic agents are absurdly inadequate in numbers. The Government did not have any agents in Los Angeles specially assigned to this work until two months ago, when two were sent from the East. Their instructions included an order to look into reports that drugs were being sold at motion picture studios. These agents have been trying to get evidence of "snow parties" as the gatherings of drug addicts are called, in Hollywood and Los Angeles, but have not yet succeeded. "Snow" is the modern underworld name for cocaine. Addicts speak of taking a "sleigh ride." The only actress to whose door the Federal men have traced forbidden drugs is not in the pictures but in vaudeville. They thought they had a good clew when told of a railroad conductor who had been invited to attend a "snow party" at the home of the director of a low grade movie company in Hollywood. The conductor went to the party in his ordinary Sunday clothes. He found the other guests and the host in pajamas. They tore off his collar and coat, but when he said that was enough they let him alone.

There were plenty of opium and pipes in the house, and a Chinese was "cooking" for the smokers. None of them was a

movie headliner. The conductor was not interested in things. He went up stairs and won \$600 in a poker game.

"There really are a good many drug addicts in the motion picture crowd," an agent of the Department of Justice told me, "but most of them are among the low class, roustabout actors, and the extra people who are not working steadily but call themselves actors. However, the stories have been wildly exaggerated. And don't forget, young man, that New York has its dope fiends, too."

A good many "extras" have been arrested as addicts at the instance of the California State Board of Pharmacy. A few years ago an officer of the Department of Internal Revenue having said there were 8,000 addicts in Los Angeles a narcotic clinic was established and maintained for a year, but the largest number of patients registered at one time was 300. A peddler arrested by the State board said he had sold cocaine to one of the fairest and most prosperous of screen actresses. No one else has accused her.

The Los Angeles police have two detectives on the narcotic detail. One of them, who appeared to me both honest and intelligent, told me that not one in fifty of the city's addicts lived or worked in Hollywood. He also told me of a high salaried, dashing movie star who reported to the police that a peddler was stealing the stuff that dreams are made of into one of the finest Hollywood studios. The star and his valet helped the police set a trap for the peddler and catch him. This recital was hugely interesting to me for on the preceding day I had been assured that this same star was himself an addict and his abdomen pitted with needle marks.

Some of the studio managements have paid no attention to rumors that drugs were being sold on or about their premises. Others are alive to this danger. One studio gave the police the address and telephone number of a woman listed as an "extra." She was sent to jail as a peddler of cocaine. She had been a cabaret entertainer and had done "bits" in pictures from time to time.

"She claimed to be an important actress, but was a bum," was my detective's appraisal.

A tip from the wife of a scenario writer enabled the police to round up a coterie of peddlers in a Los Angeles poolroom. A year and a half ago the Universal studio caused the arrest of a dispenser of morphine. He had hung around the studio, caught on as an "extra" and the moment he got past the gate began looking for customers among his fellows of the small fry. He went to jail and his wife divorced him.

Cocaine is sold in Los Angeles in "bindles." A "bindle" is done up in waxed tissue, just like a drug store powder weighs from two to two and a half grains and sells for \$2 or \$2.50. Some of the peddlers work on commission—50 cents a bindle—others buy their stock outright from the wholesaler. In their unwritten code "eight pieces of iron" or of candy means eight ounces of cocaine or morphine, and "harmonica" is heroin.

The Los Angeles detective rounded off his information with this:

"Stories of 'snow parties' in Hollywood are vague. People call us up, but don't give names or addresses. Personally I think all the 'dope' about 'dope' is exaggerated. It's the Mexicans and negroes who bother us, not the movie folk. A while ago we thought we had a good one when we heard of 'snow parties' in an old country house in Hollywood which had been rented to a count and sublet to others. The stars were supposed to gather there every night and have a 'sniff' or two. We spent three or four nights around the house. There were parties there, but it was only a mess of bootleggers."

In certain published accounts of high jinks in Hollywood marihuana is mentioned as one of the drugs consumed by the insatiable performers. Marihuana is Indian hemp, sometimes called Mexican weed. It grows wild over much of the Southwest as ragweed, which it resembles. Does in the East. Its seed is sold for birdseed. If the Californian has no back yard he can buy a quarter of an ounce of birdseed and raise enough marihuana in a window box to inspire a thousand bandits. The Mexicans mix the dried leaves with tobacco and smoke them in cigarettes. The effect is inflammatory stimulation.

The marihuana excites the nerves, deadens fear, turns a coward into a swash-buckler, accentuates evil propensities. It does not soothe or produce pleasant dreams, and is scorned by the whites. Some cowboys have picked up the habit from the Mexicans, and whatever use is made of marihuana in Hollywood is restricted to punchers and peons.

Before leaving the subject of drugs it should be pointed out that no prominent motion picture actor or actress ever has been arrested as an addict so far as I know. This merely is worth passing mention. The reader, of course, knows that addicts who are well up in the social or